

Vanessa Gardiner

On first encountering the work of Vanessa Gardiner it is easy to see the Cornish connections. The colour is startlingly reminiscent of Cornish landscape and there is a relationship to the work of artists of the St Ives School. However on closer examination this work offers so much more. Gardiner readily admits to her admiration for Ben Nicholson, however the common thread which runs between their work is the landscape itself, of which Gardiner has developed her own very personal interpretation. As a child family holidays were spent in Boscastle on the North Cornish Coast. Returning as a practicing painter she spent years investigating the structure and colour of a small section of this place nestling between two pieces of headland.

Drawing has always been fundamental to Vanessa Gardiner's practice. Her experiences of immersing herself in intensive periods of drawing as a student were formative and she observes that, "the intimacy and the intricacy of this close observational drawing stays with you for the rest of your life". Her approach to her work is through investigation and she draws extensively, until her observations of the landscape before her marry with the experience, allowing her to produce drawings of great depth, which go beyond mere representation. "There is a point at which your brain stops getting in the way and your eyes start to really look and that is more interesting. Its at that moment that you are really looking." She feels that it is only through this process that the landscape starts to reveal itself. She returns repeatedly to places in order to "glean little bits of information". It is "often a shape" which strikes a chord and she only achieves a distillation of a place, "after I have drawn it very carefully" and carried it forward "through the process of making a painting". Through an examination of what she has drawn and what essentially rises to the surface as the work progresses she arrives at an understanding of which parts of a landscape are fundamental to the final image. Working on what remains after she has either washed away the paint or rubbed it off "allows for the excitement of the accidental so that you get to the moment when you know that it is about that place".

Gardiner has always focused on the structure of the landscape and she has become increasingly aware of the relationship of that geometry to architecture. The influence on her work of the simple lines of the Romanesque Cistercian monastery of Le Thoronet in Provence was crystallised by her experience of monumental temples in Egypt in 2004. The Egyptian paintings are clearly about architecture and have clean straight lines and a structure that references the Ocean Park paintings of the American painter Richard Diebenkorn. With the modernist designs of architects like Le Corbusier in the back of her mind as well, she is increasingly combining the man-made structural approach of architecture with her interpretation of landscape and so taking full possession of her very distinctive vision.

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